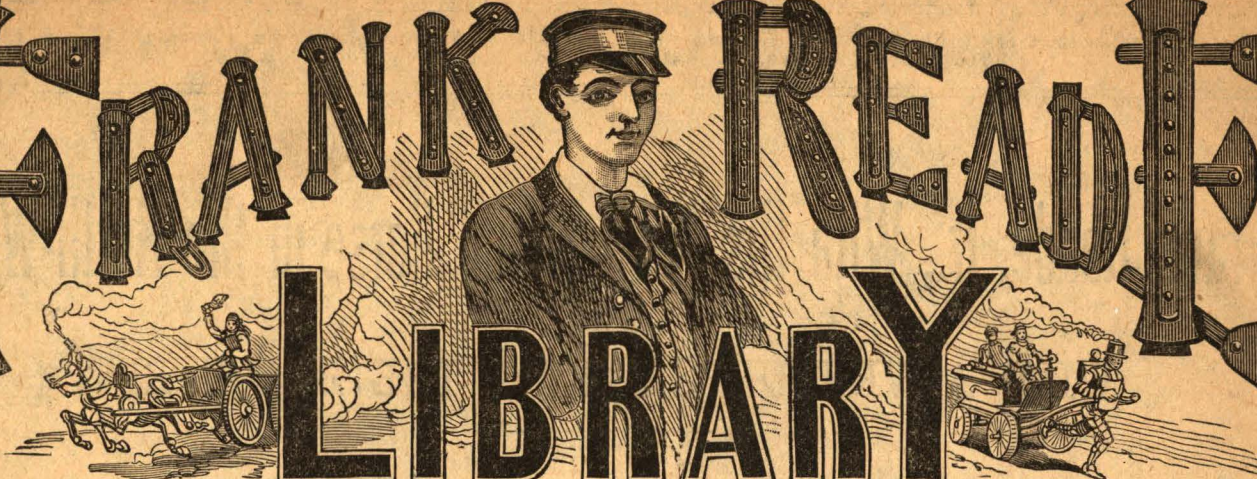


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Vol. I

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FRANK READE, JR.,

WITH HIS NEW STEAM HORSE IN THE NORTH-WEST; or, Wild Adventures Among the Blackfeet.

By "NONAME."



One of the bowlders near he selected and crept behind it. Then he opened fire. But at this moment from the woods in Walker's rear now burst the other band of savages. His case seemed hopeless. indeed, when suddenly the echoes of the wilderness were awakened with the notes of a steam whistle, the rumble of wheels and clatter of iron hoofs was heard, and into view dashed the Steam Horse. But if he was shocked the Indians were doubly so.

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Frank Reade, Jr., With His New Steam Horse in the North-West;

OR, WILD ADVENTURES AMONG THE BLACKFEET.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "Frank Reade and His Steam Man of the Plains; or, The Terror of the West," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE SETTLER.

"My soul! We are lost—hopelessly lost in this North-west wilderness!"

The speaker was a tall, handsome young man, with bronzed features and an expression in his brown eyes which betokened a woman's heart, but a lion's courage.

He was roughly dressed in the garb of a Western pioneer.

Jean pants were thrust into the tops of his heavy boots. A broad brimmed hat shaded his face, yet the rough exterior could not disguise the grace of movement and courtliness of manner which was the gentleman's stamp.

Leslie Walker was by nature cut out for a higher sphere in life than this.

But circumstances had led him to seek his fortune in the far West. Therefore, with his young wife and aged mother, he had left their Minnesota home one day in a type of the prairie schooner. And thus we find him, far in the wilds of the North-west.

He stood by the side of the faithful pair of horses hitched to the schooner, and made the remark with which we open our story.

In the canvas covered wagon were the two women, his wife and mother.

The wife was a slender and beautiful specimen of girlhood.

Indeed she seemed not at all fitted to cope with the perils of this wild region.

But in reality she was plucky and true. Indeed, her resolution was much in excess of her husband's.

Alice Walker gazed at her husband a moment with something like desperation in her eyes.

"It can't be possible, Leslie!" she said, doubtingly.

"I tell you it is true!" said the despairing young settler. "In some way we missed the trail some thirty miles back!"

"But cannot we turn back?"

"No. Last night's rain has obliterated our own trail, and we could not fail to get only more hopelessly lost."

Husband and wife looked at each other with a vague sort of terror. It meant something to become lost in this wild region, so thickly infested with the savage Blackfeet Indians.

Mrs. Walker, the elder, only clasped her wrinkled hands, and said:

"Well, may God's will be done!"

Leslie Walker advanced and lowered the check reins upon the necks of the two faithful horses attached to the schooner.

He looked about him with a keen scrutiny.

"Let me see!" he muttered, "this is not a bad place to camp. Water is near—we are sheltered by trees."

"Shall we camp?" cried his wife, with something like apprehension. "Is this a safe place, Leslie?"

The young settler hesitated.

It was not the safest place in the world.

They were, as he knew, in the Blackfoot country, and at any moment a band of the redskins might stumble upon them.

In such an event the chances were very good that their scalps would adorn the wigwam of some Indian chief in short order.

Thus far young Walker had been lucky.

They had narrowly avoided a collision with the savages twice.

There had been another route to their destination—a safer one.

But it had involved a great detour, so that Leslie had chosen this one.

It was through a corner of the territory infested by the hostiles, but Leslie had hoped to get through in three days and had accepted the risk.

His route had been laid out for him by a man well familiar with the region.

This was an old trapper who went by the name of Panther Joe.

But in some way Leslie had wandered from the trail.

"Well, Alice," he said, dubiously, "I don't see what else we can

do but camp here for the present. I feel as though it was necessary for me to first find out exactly where we are before going further."

"And how will you do that?"

The settler was silent a moment.

He seemed to be struggling with himself.

"I see no other way," he said, "but to leave you here for a brief time and go ahead a little ways upon a reconnoitering tour."

The young woman's face paled but she offered no demurrer.

"You will not be gone long, Leslie?"

"No."

"And you will be cautious?"

"Of course I will."

There was a lump in young Walker's throat as he said this, however.

He quickly advanced to the wagon and took a rifle from within it.

There were two other rifles left there, and both women knew how to handle them, as women on the frontier generally do.

"Now, Alice, if anything should happen," said the husband, anxiously, "just fire a shot. I will hear it and return at once. Until I return remain in the wagon and keep a good outlook for foes."

Mrs. Walker nodded an assent.

"Don't worry about us, Leslie," she said, bravely; "only take care of yourself."

"I will."

Then Leslie Walker leaped into the wagon and kissed both his wife and mother.

The next moment, with a choking sensation in his throat, he strode away into the forest.

There was a strange, dark foreboding upon his mind.

He felt as if upon the eve of some dreadful crisis.

But he kept on resolutely.

He looked for a time in vain for a clear country ahead.

For several miles he pushed on, seeking to gain an elevation or some point from whence he could get a good view of the country about.

But he did not seem to succeed for some time, and finally came to a small rivulet which trickled down through the forest glade.

Walker was both tired and thirsty, and the water looked tempting enough.

Without a moment's hesitation he advanced to the edge of the stream, threw himself upon his stomach and was about to drink in the cooling liquid, when he received a stunning shock of surprise.

There, in the soft, sandy bottom of the stream, was clearly visible the imprint of a moccasined foot.

Walker was thrilled at this evidence of the proximity of a foe.

For that the Indian was not far away he could not doubt.

If the footprint had not been very recently made, the water would have washed it away.

The young settler was so startled that he forgot to drink.

He knelt gazing at the footprint for some moments.

Then another startling incident occurred.

He heard the sudden snapping of a twig in the underbrush in his rear.

In a moment his acute hearing taught him that something, whether man or animal, was creeping up on him.

With this conviction the natural question to occur to the settler was as to what move he had better make.

He might be literally surrounded by the red foe for aught he knew.

His whole soul was imbued with horror.

One moment longer he knelt there upon the bank of the stream.

Then quick as a panther he sprang up, leaped the stream and dove into the underbrush upon the opposite side.

In the same moment a wild and fiendish yell broke the solitude of the north-western forest.

Young Walker had been not a moment too soon.

The air was filled with hurtling arrows.

One of these cut a gash in his cheek, and another penetrated the sleeve of his hunting jacket.

It was a literal miracle that he escaped with his life. As it was the chances were by no means good that he would yet succeed in so doing.

Into the underbrush he dashed and ran like a frightened deer.

In this course he thought not so much of his own safety as that of the two defenseless women whom he had left behind him in the prairie schooner.

Walker knew that he must lead the foe a chase directly away from the schooner in order to insure the safety of his dear ones.

This he did.

On through the underbrush he ran at a tremendous rate of speed.

He could hear the foe coming crashing after him.

But the settler's strength could not hold out forever, and he began to wax fatigued before two miles were covered.

Moreover, the woods now terminated, and he came out upon open ground.

It was a sort of plateau, over which were scattered a number of huge boulders.

Walker now believed his chances good.

By dodging among these boulders, he believed that he could elude his foes.

But he had hardly crossed half of the plateau, when suddenly he saw a whole war party of the Blackfeet, on foot, and just ahead of him.

They had seen him, and were evidently bound to cut him off.

What was to be done?

Walker's sensations were those of utmost helplessness and despair.

With the enemy in his rear and now facing him, there seemed little chance of escape.

But Leslie Walker was made of the stuff of which heroes are composed.

He was determined to never surrender.

With his repeating rifle he believed he could give the foe a hard fight, providing he found good shelter.

One of the boulders near he selected and crept behind it.

The savages came on with yells of fiendish kind.

Leslie waited until they were within range. Then he opened fire.

The result was that one of the savages tumbled in a heap.

But at this moment from the woods in Walker's rear now burst the other band of savages.

He was now between two fires.

His case seemed hopeless, indeed, when suddenly a startling thing happened.

The echoes of the wilderness were awakened with the notes of a steam whistle, the rumble of wheels and clatter of iron hoofs was heard, and into view dashed an object which gave Walker the greatest shock of his life.

But if he was shocked the Indians were doubly so.

CHAPTER II.

THE STEAM HORSE.

WHAT Leslie Walker saw was a horse made of plates of iron and seemingly operated by the power of steam and all hitched to a curious-looking covered wagon.

It was literally a Steam Horse, and the like Leslie had never seen before nor even dreamed of.

He stood agape, gazing at the thrilling spectacle.

Straight across the plateau galloped the Steam Horse.

Then from loopholes in the sides of the wagon were thrust rifle barrels and a volley was poured into the midst of the Blackfeet.

Terrified and demoralized, the savages broke ranks and fled in the wildest confusion.

In a few seconds not a savage was in sight.

To say that the settler was astounded is putting facts mild.

He would not for a moment believe that it was not a dream.

"Thunder and guns!" he muttered. "What sort of an invention is that?"

His question was quickly answered.

The Steam Horse came to a halt not fifty yards away.

A door in the rear of the covered wagon opened, and a white man stepped out.

At the same moment the sides of the wagon, which seemed like lattice work, suddenly shot downward and revealed two other men seated in the wagon, which was now an open vehicle.

The man who had descended was a mere youth in appearance.

He wore a dark suit, with an engineer's natty cap, and his fine, handsome features were lit up with a pleasant smile.

He held up one hand as a token of amity.

"All right, friend!" he cried, in a cheery voice. "You need not fear us. We happened along just right, I take it, to rescue you from those Blackfeet."

Walker recovered himself.

"For which I am indebted to you!" he cried.

"There is no indebtedness about it," was the reply. "I am glad to meet you."

"The same to you," replied Walker, earnestly, as he advanced and took the other's hand. "My name is Leslie Walker."

"And I am Frank Reade, Jr., from Readestown, U. S. A. This is my Steam Horse, and the gentlemen in the carriage are fellow travelers, Barney and Pomp by name."

A genial-faced Irishman, of the regular Tipperary type, and a short, good-natured looking negro, black as soot, arose and bowed to Walker. The settler was quite overwhelmed.

"Well!" he exclaimed, "I don't know whether I am dreaming or not, but this is the most singular experience I have ever had. For instance, who ever heard of a Steam Horse before?"

Frank Reade, Jr., laughed.

"Well, you see, it is an invention of my own," he declared. "Nobody else has one like it."

"I should say not!" gasped the astonished settler. "It goes by steam?"

"Yes."

"Much on the principle of a locomotive?"

"Exactly, only I need no track."

Walker rubbed his eyes.

"I'm not dreaming," he muttered. "Pardon me, Mr. Reade, but have you traveled far with that machine?"

"Two thousand miles over the plains!"

"Whew! What are you after out here?"

"I am on an exploring tour," replied the young inventor. "I have heard of the existence of a region north of the Assiniboine country which is a wonderland of geysers and hot springs far exceeding the Yellowstone wonders. I wish to confirm the report."

"I believe you can do it," replied Walker, eagerly. "I have heard of it myself."

"Indeed! Then you are familiar with this region?"

"No, I am not. I am a settler and own a thousand acres up near the line, where I intend to settle and begin stock raising."

With this Walker detailed an account of his trip into the Northwest.

Frank Reade, Jr., listened with deep interest.

"I should think it a bit risky, Mr. Walker," he said, brusquely, "to have come away and left your women where they are. I would advise you to return to them at once!"

"I mean to do so," replied the settler.

"If you wish, I will volunteer to take you back to them."

"Do you mean it?" asked the settler, eagerly.

"I do!"

"I am more than anxious to return to them quickly!"

"Then you shall go with me, and I will get you there much quicker than you could walk, if there is a clear enough way through the woods."

"I think there is!"

"All aboard then!"

Frank Reade, Jr., led the way to the wagon and motioned for Walker to get aboard. The settler did so.

"Now, Barney," said the young inventor, "take Mr. Walker's directions and go ahead!"

"All right, sor!" replied the Celt.

Walker described the course by which he had come, and away galloped the Steam Horse.

The settler could not recover from his great wonderment at the wonderful character of this strange invention.

Frank Reade, Jr., saw this in his face, and with a pleasant laugh said:

"You are interested in the Horse, Mr. Walker. I will then describe its mechanism to you!"

"I shall be very glad to listen," replied the settler, eagerly.

"Well, to begin at the beginning," said Frank Reade, Jr. "I have been all my life a student of mechanics, and this is only one of many inventions I have brought out."

"Ah, indeed. Is it patented?" asked the settler, innocently.

Frank Reade, Jr., nearly collapsed with laughter, as did Barney and Pomp.

"No, I have not considered that necessary," replied the young inventor.

"Somebody might steal your idea."

"They are welcome to do it if they can. I don't manufacture Steam Horses for the trade. This machine I have devised for my own amusement and profit."

"But to resume. I come naturally by my inventive talents, as my father was an inventor of great note."

"He founded Readestown, my home, and I have erected large works there for the manufacture of my inventions."

"The idea of the Steam Horse came to me naturally enough."

"I had invented the Steam Man, and it had worked so well that I conceived the plan of a Steam Horse. At once I went to work upon my new idea and soon had it in shape."

"As you see, it is the perfect model of a horse, made of plates of steel riveted, and where necessary jointed or hinged."

"In the Horse's chest I have placed the furnace; in its body is the boiler and steam chest."

"The Horse and wagon are joined by the two cylinders which are placed upon the shafts, as you will see. From the pistons there extend steel driving rods and joints, which are put together in such a way that the action of the driving rod causes the Horse to throw its legs with perfect action and gallop just like the original beast."

"Between the Horse's ears you can see the whistle. Upon the saddle is the steam indicator and gauge."

"The smoke from the furnace escapes through the nostrils, and the lower jaw sways the throttle valves, so that by using these long reins the speed of the Horse can easily be diminished or increased."

"So much for the Horse. Now take a look at the wagon."

"You can see that it has four wheels and is made of steel. There is a brake at the dasher to guide the team by. The sides of the wagon you see comprise curtains of plates of steel and made to run up or

down on rollers. Here are lockers for weapons and stores and a large bunker for coal.

"Whenever we get out of coal we use wood, but generally there are coal mines enough to be found to get a supply any time we may need it.

"This is, as you may see, a description of my invention," concluded Frank, modestly.

"And a wonderful one it is, too," cried the settler, admiringly.

"I consider it one of the wonders of the age."

At this moment Barney suddenly put up his hand.

"What's the matter?" asked Frank Reade, Jr., sharply.

"Well, Marse Frank, mebbe it am my imagination," cried Pomp, before the Celt could answer, "but jes' so suah as yo' am alibe, dis minnit I done finks I heard de firin' ob guns ober yonder."

"Begorra, I was goin' ter say that same meself, Misther Frank!" cried Barney.

Suddenly Walker leaped up with a wild cry.

"My God!" he gasped. "I really believe that is my women folks. It sounds like my rifle!"

"Do you believe it?" exclaimed Frank Reade, Jr., sharply.

"Upon my word, I do."

"Put on more steam, Barney."

The agonized settler was wringing his hands bitterly.

"God be with them!" he cried, prayerfully. "I fear the worst."

Frank Reade, Jr., was not unmindful of the horrors of the situation. Two women attacked by hostile Blackfeet in that wild region would stand scant show of escape.

That they would be captured by the savages seemed to Frank Reade, Jr., a foregone conclusion.

He knew well the blood-thirsty proclivities of the Blackfeet.

There was little doubt but that they would be instantly slaughtered by the blood-thirsty fiends.

The thought was enough to fire the soul of any man.

The settler crouched in the bottom of the wagon.

On fled the Steam Horse with wildest speed.

Barney was a skillful engineer, and put the Steam Horse to its best speed.

On and on through the forest path they sped.

Suddenly a warning cry went up.

Half a dozen savages were seen in the forest path ahead.

They had a lariat stretched across the path to stop the Steam Horse as it came thundering on.

There was no doubt in their crude minds but that they would be would be able to throw the iron steed if nothing more.

"Begorra! wud ye iuk at that!" cried Barney, with a roar of laughter.

Then he opened the throttle wide.

The next moment the Steam Horse struck the lariat.

The effect was ludicrous.

For a moment the air was full of somersaulting Blackfeet.

Those who hung on to the lariat were drawn under the wheels of the wagon and crushed. The others were hurled about like puppets.

The next moment the Steam Horse had dashed into the clearing where Walker had left the prairie schooner.

A cry of agony escaped his lips. The schooner was gone.

CHAPTER III.

A PRACTICAL JOKE.

It required but a glance to see this. The prairie schooner was not where Walker had left it.

But upon the greensward of the glade lay the blood-stained bodies of three of the Blackfeet.

That told the story.

The brave women had made a noble defense, and if taken captives had certainly made it expensive for the savages.

"By Jupiter!" cried Frank Reade, Jr., "there has been a bit of a fight here. Don't give up, Walker, your women may be safe, after all."

"No," cried the settler, rigidly and with pallid face, "they are lost!"

"Perhaps not. They may have been taken prisoners, and we may be able to rescue them yet."

But Walker shook his head.

"I know the Indian nature too well," he declared. "They are dead."

And nothing would dispossess him of this belief.

Frank first made sure that the vicinity was clear, then he descended from the wagon and began to make an examination.

There was no doubt about it, the two women had made a desperate stand.

There were hoof and wheel marks in the turf, and it looked as if the savages had seized upon the team and driven it away.

This was true, or the brave women had themselves sought safety in flight.

Walker would not believe the latter theory.

"I tell you it is all wrong," he declared, vehemently. "They would have stood their ground and waited for me!"

"But when they found you did not come, what then?" asked Frank.

But the settler was unconvinced.

But there was no time to lose.

It was necessary to act with the greatest of despatch.

At once the trail was taken.

It led to the southward for a mile and then diverged into a sandy plain miles in extent to the Black river beyond.

Here the nature of the ground was such that the trail was lost.

Until dark the search was kept up.

But it was all in vain.

Not a trace of the missing ones could be found anywhere. At length it was necessary to abandon the quest.

Poor Walker was in a terrible state of mind.

He was wholly inconsolable, and would not abandon the idea that his dear ones were dead.

Darkness was now at hand and it became necessary to camp.

Of course the Steam Horse could have traveled on in the darkness, with a headlight to guide the way.

But Frank was averse to traveling in the night.

There was great risk of permanently injuring the Steam Horse by running into unseen holes or traps.

So it was decided to camp right in the open plain.

A good watch could be kept upon all sides, and a foe would have difficulty in creeping up unawares.

A fire was built and Pomp, who was a first class cook, provided the evening meal.

It was eaten with much relish by all except poor Walker.

The grief-stricken settler would accept nothing.

"Oh, to think that I should have sacrificed their lives so needlessly!" he wailed. "I should never have brought them into this accursed region! It is just punishment upon me."

"Don't say that," said Frank Reade, Jr., sincerely. "All may come out right yet."

"I don't believe it!" cried the poor fellow, desperately. "I tell you they are lost!"

Pomp and Barney now partook of their supper, and then both began to clean up for the night.

The cooking utensils were washed and put away, and blankets were produced for use in the bunks in the wagon.

Barney and Pomp were the best of friends, but yet the most inveterate of practical jokers.

At every opportunity one was bound to play tricks upon the other. Many a friendly rough-and-tumble they indulged in, and it was even up between them.

All day long Barney had been itching to get in one at the darky.

The chance came shortly after the evening meal.

Pomp had in some mysterious way got hold of a bottle of prime old whisky.

Now there was nothing in Barney's eyes to be compared with a smack of old rye.

But Pomp understood the Celt's penchant well, and perhaps a little selfishly kept the possession of the liquor a secret.

But this was not true.

Barney had discovered the fact and with true resentment muttered: "Begorra, I'll pay the naygur up for that. Shure he's a stingy thing!"

Pomp never took his whisky raw, but was fond of diluting it with water and adding a few spices.

The drink, matured well, was his great delight. To mature it, he would mix the liquor at an unobserved moment and then secrete the glass under one of the wagon standards.

When the proper time came he would seek his genial nightcap, and with many a smack of his lips and inward groan of relish proceed to satisfy the inner man.

It required no small mental struggle upon Barney's part to forego the temptation of emptying the glass himself the first time he discovered it.

"The mean spalpeen," he muttered, indignantly, "to think av his keeping all that to himself. Shure, I'll give him a lesson he'll never forget!"

The Celt was as good as his word.

He managed to extract some bitter aloes and jalap from Frank's medicine chest.

Then he procured a bottle of red pepper and mustard.

From this combination he elicited a compound which would have made an alligator ill, to say nothing of a poor negro.

Barney had watched his opportunity all day.

Now his chance had come.

Pomp had prepared his toddy, and it was in its hiding-place.

While he was busy about the supper, and Barney had the chance, he crept chuckling to the place where the liquor was secreted.

In just two seconds the appetizer was in Barney's stomach; he was smacking his lips heartily, and saying:

"Begorra, that's loike an angel's smole. Shure, here's somethin' to take the place av it that's like the devil's laugh."

Chuckling to himself, Barney filled the glass with the villainous compound he had devised, and then slunk away.

After supper the Celt, with inward amazement, observed Pomp's uneasy actions.

"Shure, I'll give him the chance!" muttered the Celt.

And he did so.

Presently Pomp approached his desired goal, and believing that no eyes were upon him, drew the glass from its hiding-place.

It was dark, and having no doubt of its contents, the darky placed it to his lips and drained it.

The effect was lightning like.

It did not require an infinitesimal part of a second for the darky to discover that he had taken something very different from his delightful toddy.

The dose nearly strangled him, and for a moment he fancied that his whole windpipe and stomach was burned out.

"Fo' massy's sakes, what am dat?" he gasped, in horror. "I hab done took de wrong medicine!"

Barney could hold in no longer.

It was useless for him to conceal his feelings or his hand in the business.

It was too rich an opportunity to get hunk with the darky.

So he gave way to literal roars of laughter.

"Ho, ho, ho!" he shrieked. "Yez got it that toime, didn't yez, naygur? Begorra, that pays yez well for yer stinginess!"

And Barney was convulsed.

Pomp at once saw through the whole game. He realized that the Celt had certainly got the upper crust this time, and he was naturally crestfallen and mad as well.

"Fo' de Lor' sakes, did yo' put dat pizen stuff dar, yo' big Irish stuff?" he yelled. "I'll hab yo' haht's blood fo' dat!"

Pomp made a rush at Barney.

There was the fire of righteous indignation in the darky's soul, and he would have given Barney a hard tussle if he had been in his normal state.

But the Celt knew that he had nothing to fear at the moment.

The wretched dose taken by Pomp began to get in its work.

Everybody knows that jalap and aloes are sickening articles.

Pomp's stomach began to undergo a decided revulsion.

So terribly sick was the darky that he rolled upon the ground, holding on to his stomach and howling dismally.

But relief came soon in vomiting, and directly Pomp began to improve.

But he was a weak-kneed darky when he did recover.

Barney had had fun enough for one night.

The racket of course had attracted the attention of Frank and Walker.

Frank read Barney a lecture and the affair ended.

But revenge lurked in Pomp's heart.

"Fo' de Lor'!" he muttered, grimly, as he crawled into his bunk. "I'se gwine fo' to git squar wif dat Irishman if I lib fo' to see anoder day!"

It was arranged that Walker and Barney were to watch alternately during the night.

It was not apprehended by Frank that the Blackfeet would attack them.

Yet it was better to be prepared. So all due precautions were taken.

It was Barney's turn to watch the first half of the night.

It was near midnight before anything of a thrilling nature occurred.

Then suddenly the Celt saw a moving figure out on the prairie.

Then the long howl of a coyote went up on the air.

"Begorra, I've a moind to risk a shot at the bast!" muttered Barney.

But he reflected that it would unnecessarily arouse the others, so he desisted.

Pretty quick another coyote was seen and soon fully a score of them were moving about the plains.

At least so it seemed to Barney.

Their cries were long drawn and mournful on the night air.

Several times the Celt was tempted to fire at them but desisted.

Finally it came time for him to arouse Walker.

But the settler was on hand at once. He had been unable to sleep.

He arose and Barney was about to lie down when a startled cry escaped his lips:

"Look! What is that?"

"Shure it's only a lot av coyotes," replied Barney.

"No, look!" cried the settler, with horror.

And in that instant Barney saw his mistake. The mistaken coyotes were Indians coming to the attack, and in a jiffy the wagon was literally surrounded by them.

CHAPTER IV.

BRAVE FIGHT OF THE WOMEN.

ALICE WALKER and her mother, left in the prairie schooner, were also afflicted with the same foreboding of danger which had fallen upon Leslie Walker.

After Leslie had gone a great pall seemed to settle down about them.

Each gazed into the pallid face of the other.

"Why is it, mother?" exclaimed the young wife; "I feel strangely terrified."

"I cannot understand it, my dear," said the elderly woman.

"I feel as if something terrible was going to happen."

"I must confess to the same feeling."

"What can it mean?"

"Heaven alone knows!"

"Oh, I wish Leslie had not gone! I fear for him!"

"We can only trust in God, child, and pray Him to guide us."

"But what if we were attacked by the Indians?"

Both women shivered.

Alice picked up one of the rifles and examined it.

She had been taught by her husband how to use it well.

The idea occurred to her that it would be well to be prepared for an attack even though it did not come.

So she saw that the magazines of both rifles were filled.

They were Winchesters, sixteen shot each, and in the hands of experienced marksmen a weapon to be dreaded.

Then Alice knotted the reins and headed the horses to the southward or the direction they had come from.

She knew that it would take them toward civilization and this would be the best course.

Then the two women sat down to await the return of Leslie.

The minutes seemed hours and time literally dragged by.

The pall of gloom upon their spirits seemed to deepen every moment.

Silent and with strained nerves they waited and watched.

Every rustling leaf or cracking twig in the forest brought Alice to face the apprehended danger.

And thus the time passed.

And it happened that their forebodings were not without foundation.

Suddenly Alice gave a little, startled cry.

"My soul! There is an Indian, mother!"

The elder woman was pallid as a ghost, but calmly asked:

"Where, my child?"

"Yonder, in the cover of those trees."

Sure enough, there, plainly discernible, crouching in the undergrowth, was a powerful framed Blackfoot savage.

A cold, crawling sensation came over Alice as she watched the wretch.

It was truly an awful position for the two women.

"What do you suppose he means by crouching there?" whispered Alice.

"I do not know."

"Do you think there are others near?"

"I have no doubt of it."

Alice wrung her hands.

"Oh, my God!" she moaned. "What if Leslie should return now? He would not more than enter this clearing before he would be shot down."

It was a horrible thought to the two agonized women.

Finally the suspense became unbearable.

"Do you know, I've a mind to fire at him," whispered Alice.

"No!"

"Why?"

"He may be a friendly Indian!"

Alice shrugged her shoulders.

"That is hardly likely!" she declared. "Ah, see that!"

The savage had drawn his bow and was aiming an arrow at Alice.

Just in time the young wife dodged.

The arrow grazed her forehead.

Action was quick upon her part.

She flung the rifle to her shoulder and pulled the trigger.

Crack!

There was a wild, agonizing death cry and the savage reeled into the open and fell dead.

It was the signal for the battle.

From various quarters there now came maddened and fierce yells.

Another savage leaped from cover and started for the wagon.

Mrs. Walker drew aim upon that one and fired.

The bullet went true to its mark.

The wretch threw up his arms and fell dead. Another appeared and Alice brought him down.

But the clearing now literally swarmed with the savages.

It was quite useless to think of standing a battle.

They would quickly be upon the wagon, and a hand-to-hand conflict would be fatal.

Besides the arrows were flying.

Two had cut gashes in Alice's arm, and one had passed through Mrs. Walker's sleeve.

There was no time to lose.

Alice acted quickly.

She seized the reins and lashed the horses with the whip.

Away they went at full speed along the southward trail.

The savages followed.

They were on foot, but it was not difficult for them to keep in sight of the lumbering prairie schooner.

On went the horses under Alice's skilled guidance.

The savages came howling after, but they did not gain upon the schooner.

Alice lashed the horses again and again with the whip.

After a time they came to a wide, sandy plain.

Out upon this they galloped, but still the Indians kept in the rear.

The horses were not of a speedy pattern and could not travel fast.

Alice looked back fearfully from time to time.

She knew that it would not be difficult for the Indians to keep up that gait for a long time.

It was therefore possible that they would yet overtake the wagon.

Mrs. Walker, at every available opportunity, sent a telling shot into the midst of the savage pursuers.

On across the plain went the pursued and the pursuers, neither gaining advantage.

After a time a long mountain wall was seen to the southward.

Alice suddenly experienced a chill.

"Oh, mother," she cried, "we are lost!"

"What?" gasped Mrs. Walker.

"It is true."

"How so?"

Alice pointed ahead.

"We should have borne more to the eastward here. Don't you remember the fearful step-off just ahead?"

Mrs. Walker remembered that the plain terminated in a fearful descent, down which no horse could safely go.

It was the descent to the bed of a canyon stream, which extended far up into the mountains.

This was a terrible thing to consider.

It was impossible to turn about now.

The savages were between them and the direction it would be necessary to take.

What was to be done?

Awful horror was upon them.

They must certainly be brought to a halt at the precipice.

What could they hope to do in the face of all those savage foes?

"Well," said Mrs. Walker, resolutely, "we will kill a few of them before they can tomahawk us."

Alice picked up her rifle.

"You are right; we will!" she declared.

"I have heard that the Indian is a coward in open field. Perhaps we can hold them at bay!"

"We will try!"

The horses had now come to a halt.

The sheer walls of the canyon were before them and there was no other alternative.

Alice and Mrs. Walker now opened fire upon the red foe.

At that distance the rifles made deadly work.

A Sioux or an Apache would have halted and kept a safe distance.

But the Blackfoot is a dogged and courageous savage and not easily beaten.

Therefore they kept straight, and the two women saw that their cause was lost.

But yet they kept up the fight, until the savages actually clambered into the wagon and disarmed them.

The plain was strewn with dead Indians, yet the savages had not fired a shot at the women.

A tall chief who ran in advance had prevented this. His orders had been to capture the women alive.

If there is one thing that the Indian admires it is a plucky woman.

This might have explained the motives of the haughty Blackfoot chief.

Perhaps he saw in them a valuable addition to the wigwams of his braves.

At any rate the two women were not tomahawked but made prisoners.

Then such jabbering and excitement as followed.

The contents of the schooner were confiscated and also the horses and harness.

But the wagon was rolled over the edge of the precipice to become a wreck in the bed of the canyon below.

Then the two captives were placed upon the backs of the horses and a march to the northward begun.

For the rest of the day this was kept up.

When evening came they had left the plain far behind.

Camp was made in the depths of a mighty forest.

The two captives were pale and fearful but yet calm.

"Where do you suppose they are going to take us, mother?" whispered Alice.

"Without doubt to their Indian village!" replied Mrs. Walker. "I think we need fear no harm at present. But when they get us there they will doubtless make slaves of us."

"A pleasant fate to contemplate!"

"But it might be worse!"

"That is true."

The two women were now taken from their horses and with their arms bound behind them were allowed to sit upon a fallen tree in the edge of the camp.

A fire was made and the savages began to hold a council around it.

In their interest in the proceedings the Blackfeet relaxed their vigilant watch of the prisoners.

So it happened that Alice suddenly heard a movement behind her.

Turning her head, she saw in the gloom the form of a man in trapper's garb. Then a familiar voice reached her ears in a soft whisper: "Sh! Keep cool an' don't lose yer head. If yer will keep right quiet mebber I kin save ye!"

"Panther Joe!" whispered Alice, with a wild thrill, as she recognized the scout.

Certainly the outlook was beginning to look brighter. But danger was all about.

CHAPTER V.

THE BUFFALO STAMPEDE.

It was a thrilling moment for Barney when he saw the Blackfeet swarming about the wagon.

It was odd indeed that he should have mistaken them for coyotes.

But aided by the darkness and the fact that they crawled upon all fours, just as an animal would, they had been able to make the deception perfect.

"Indians!" gasped Walker, clutching his rifle. "What shall we do?"

"Whurroo!" cried Barney, with a leap in the air. "Wake up, Mither Frank! Shure there's music in the air!"

Frank, who was a light sleeper, was upon his feet almost instantly.

"Eh! What?" he cried. "What's up, Barney?"

"Shure, sor, it's attacked we be by the spalpeens av Injuns!"

It needed but a glance for Frank to see this.

He realized the danger at once, and was quick to act.

"Lively!" he cried. "Give them a volley!"

Pomp was aroused by this time, and was by the side of Barney and Walker in an instant.

It was easy to pour a rattling volley into the midst of the gang of savages.

The volley was given none too soon.

Another moment and the Blackfeet would have got their hands upon the wagon.

Frank Reade, Jr., had sprung to the dasher and opened the throttle.

The Steam Horse, with a snort, leaped forward and right into the midst of the savage crew.

They tried to stop the iron steed, but in vain.

Savages were hurled right and left, crushed under the wagon wheels, and cut to pieces by the deadly knives upon the wagon hubs.

Straight through the yelling horde the Steam Horse cut its way.

Nothing could check its course.

In a few moments the Horse had cleared the attacking gang and was racing away across the plain.

On went the Horse at a mad gait.

It was the same plain that the female prisoners of Red Knife, the Blackfoot chief, had crossed some hours before.

None of the Steam Horse party knew of the termination of the prairie in the bed of a deep canyon.

Therefore it was certain that all would have found a grave at the foot of the awful precipice had it not been for Walker.

The settler suddenly remembered crossing the plain, and that it had been skirted upon one side by a mighty abyss.

It came to him with an awful thrill of horror.

He knew that they could not be far from it at that moment.

Instantly he sprang up.

"Hold!" he cried with wildest terror. "Stop now! We are going to death!"

"What!" cried Frank Reade, Jr. "What do you mean?"

"Stop, for the love of God!" shrieked the settler.

Frank brought the Steam Horse to a full stop.

It did not take Walker long to fully explain matters.

All was darkness ahead.

Frank tried to penetrate the gloom with his gaze and fancied that he saw the dark void which constituted the abyss.

He stepped out of the wagon and advanced some yards in the darkness.

"My God!" he cried, "this is the most narrow escape yet. We are but fifty yards from the precipice!"

The effect of this declaration upon the others can be imagined.

Overwhelmed with horror all realized fully what a narrow escape had been theirs.

"How did you know of the precipice?" asked Frank of Walker.

The settler explained how his course of the day before had led directly across this plain.

There was deep reason for congratulations.

Had the settler been two minutes later in his declaration of danger the result would have been awful to contemplate.

The savages could be heard now in the rear.

Doubtless they had thought of the precipice and the possibility of the Steam Horse going over it.

Frank shrugged his shoulders.

"It is a close call!" he declared. "I was never in favor of traveling at night. But it seems now to be a necessity."

"Shure, sor, the Injuns are hot after us!" cried Barney.

Frank sprang back into the wagon and turned the Horse square about.

"What are you going to do?" asked Walker, with apprehension. ■

"I am going right back across the plain!"

"And meet the Indians?"

"I don't care for them!" cried Frank. "We can whip them easy enough. What we must find is a good safe camping place!"

Frank opened the throttle and let the Steam Horse out.

For a ways they fled across the plain like a meteor.

Then suddenly Barney cried:

"Shure, Mither Frank, do yez hear that dreadful noise?"

Frank did hear it.

It sounded like distant thunder, and the floor of the prairie was trembling violently.

The savages had mysteriously disappeared.

Not one had put in an appearance. But a short while before they had been plainly heard.

What did it mean?

Instinctively Frank checked the Steam Horse. With the cessation of the noise of the machinery the distant sound became more comprehensive.

"Phwat is it?" cried Barney. "Shure it's loike an aithquake, Mither Frank!"

"Golly! I done fink dat it am a big flood ob water ober yender in dat canyon," cried Pomp.

"It certainly sounds like roaring waters!" said Walker.

"Yet, it cannot be that," said Frank; "it grows plainer."

What did it mean?

An explanation was quickly at hand.

Walker was the first to guess its meaning, and he sprang up with a startled cry.

"I've got it!" he cried.

"What is it?" asked Frank.
 "You will notice that all of the savages have cleared out?"
 "Yes!"
 "They know the danger. It is not often that such a thing happens at night, but there is certainly a big herd of buffaloes moving across the plain!"
 "Buffaloes!" cried Frank with inspiration. "You are right!"
 "A stampede of buffaloes is a bad thing!" rejoined the settler; "they will crush everything before them."
 "My soul, you are right!" cried the young inventor, wildly. "We must make quick action or we are lost."
 But what was to be done?
 To attempt to return across the plain now would be to meet the buffaloes.
 To go in the opposite direction would be to meet the precipice over which the buffaloes seemed fated to go.
 Frank was thrilled with horror.
 Great beads of cold perspiration stood out upon his face.
 "My God!" he moaned. "What shall we do? We are lost!"
 "Wait!" cried the settler, springing up. "I believe there is a chance!"
 "What is it?"
 "As near as I can remember the plain to the north here is clear. Perhaps by running in that direction we can outflank the herd of buffaloes!"
 There was logic in this.
 Frank knew it.
 Of course there was the risk of running unawares upon some section of the canyon abyss or encountering some obstacle which might wreck the Horse.
 But if the plain was clear there was no doubt but that they would get through all right.
 Unless the line of buffaloes extended to the extreme north end of the plain Frank believed that he could outrun them.
 It was a desperate chance.
 But something had got to be done.
 Every moment the thunder of hoofs grew nearer. There was no time to lose.
 With inspiration Frank shaped the course to the northward.
 "May God be with us!" he cried. "We can only make the attempt. It is certain death to attempt any other move."
 Away fled the Horse through the darkness.
 Of course the headlight showed the plain some small distance ahead.
 But in the main it was chance work, and at any moment they might have encountered instant death.
 But as fortune would have it the surface of the plain proved smooth and clear.
 On, faster and faster they went.
 The wagon occasionally struck a hummock in the prairie and gave the inmates a shaking up.
 But no serious injury was done.
 Every moment the thunder of the oncoming herd of buffaloes could be heard plainer and nearer.
 But suddenly Frank checked the speed of the Horse.
 A great cry of relief escaped his lips.
 "We are saved!"
 At that moment a buffalo went plunging across the Horse's path. Several passed at the rear of the wagon.
 They had passed the outer line of the herd and were safe.
 Their thundering tread was now heard receding in the distance.
 To be sure it had been a close call, but safety was assured all the same.
 They had defeated the Blackfeet, outrun the buffalo herd and were for the nonce safe.
 But new dangers were ahead.
 Plans were now discussed, and it was decided to select some suitable spot and go into camp.
 Nothing of consequence could be done until daylight came. So the Steam Horse once more went into camp.
 The rest of the night passed without incident worthy of note.
 When the first light of dawn appeared in the east the party was astir.
 There was much to be done that day and there was no disposition to lag in the quest for the captive women.
 With daylight their position was quite plain.
 They were at the upper end of the strip of prairie and near a range of hills.
 It had occurred to the settler, Walker, that it would not be a bad idea to climb one of these hills and take a survey of the country.
 He imparted this idea to Frank.
 "A very excellent idea!" declared the young inventor. "We will go together, Walker."
 This pleased the settler well.
 He was the first to spring out of the wagon, but his feet had barely touched the ground when he gave a gasping cry and fell.
 Frank saw a bullet wound in his forehead and realized that he had received a probably fatal wound.

CHAPTER VI.

PANTHER JOE'S GOOD WORK.

ALICE WALKER was more than delighted when she realized that Panther Joe, the scout, was near her and trying to effect their rescue. The old scout and trapper, so widely known through the North-west, was a bosom friend of Leslie Walker.

It was Panther Joe who had given Walker the dangerous short cut through the Blackfoot country.
 The scout had repented it as soon as intelligence came to him that the Blackfeet were once more on the war-path.
 "By jingo," he muttered, "I've likely sent them greenhorns to their doom! Wall, I'll jes' take a run up thar ter onct, an' see if I can't help pull them through."
 As it happened, Panther Joe had been in hiding and saw the savages go by with their two prisoners.
 He had at once took the trail and followed the party up.
 "Wall, you kin bet it's Panther Joe!" whispered the scout in reply to the remark of Alice. "He ain't goin' ter see any harm come to ye, nuther. D've understand?"
 "Thank Heaven!" murmured the settler's wife. "Oh, if you can only get us out of this place, Joe!"
 "Wall, you bet I will."
 "But take good care! The foe are all about and they are very cunning."
 "I know thet. But where is yer man?"
 "Leslie?"
 "Yas."
 "I do not know."
 With this Alice whispering told the events of the day hastily.
 "Wall!" exclaimed the scout, testily, "I allus reckoned Leslie Walker had more sense than ter go off an' leave you women folk in such a way as that!"
 "Sh!" exclaimed the settler's wife, warningly; "look out for'danger!"
 Panther Joe sank down among the wood ferns as a savage stalked by. Then when once more the coast was clear, he whispered:
 "Now, watch your chance. When I whistle break for the clump of bushes right behind ye!"
 Then he reached up and cut the thongs which bound the wrists of both women.
 The trapper slunk back into the shadows like a shadow himself.
 He waited and watched for what he believed was the favorable opportunity.
 Then he said in a sibilant whisper:
 "Come!"
 Instantly Alice silently arose from the log and glided into the forest.
 Mrs. Walker followed her.
 The trapper grabbed their hands and dragged rather than led them away through the forest arches.
 There was not a moment's time to lose.
 The moment the savages discovered their escape a hue and cry would be raised.
 It would not be so difficult for them to overtake the fugitives. Therefore it was necessary to get a good lead.
 On through the forest arches they rushed at headlong speed.
 "Quick!" gasped Panther Joe; "ye must hurry!"
 Mrs. Walker, out of breath, sank down upon the ground.
 "Leave me!" she said, gaspingly. "I am not afraid to die!"
 "Oh, mother," wailed Alice, "we cannot do that!"
 "Can't ye go further?" asked the trapper.
 "My strength is gone."
 "Wall, we ain't goin' ter leave ye."
 With the greatest ease the huge backwoodsman lifted the light form of the woman upon his powerful back.
 Then away through the woods they dashed once more.
 And now from the distance a thrilling sound came.
 It was a long drawn yell, followed by a chorus of yells.
 The escape had been discovered.
 Pursuit would of course at once be organized.
 There was not a moment to lose.
 The trapper staggered on with his load, and Alice had sunk down half fainting just as they reached a vine clad precipice.
 "Oh, my God! they will overtake us!" cried Alice, despairingly.
 "I can go no further—I am exhausted!"
 "But ye ain't got ter go any further!" cried the trapper.
 With this, he instantly lifted the veil of vines and disclosed a deep-mouthed cavern in the rocks.
 "A cave!" cried Alice, joyfully.
 "Yes," rejoined the scout; "ye'll be safe enough in thar."
 Alice crawled into the cave, and the trapper carried Mrs. Walker inside.
 Then he adjusted the vines, and, sitting there in the darkness, they awaited the coming of the foe.
 The distant yells of the savages were plainly heard.
 As they momentarily drew nearer, it was safe to assume that they were upon the trail.
 Of course, it was not impossible but that they would trail the escaped prisoners into the cave.
 But there was a good chance that in so secure a hiding-place they would escape discovery.
 From behind the veil of vines it was easy to see shadowy forms in the dark woods beyond.
 Presently a light was seen coming through the forest.
 The trapper understood all.
 They were following the trail, and must soon reach the cave.
 Whether they would discover the hiding-place, was a question which remained to be answered.
 The trapper gripped the stock of his rifle and waited grimly.
 There would be a desperate fight if the cave was discovered.

The trapper was resolved that he would not submit to capture. It was a thrilling situation.

The suspense was dreadful.

The three inmates of the cave watched the coming of the light through the dark forest.

It came along slowly, as it was necessary for the trailers to proceed slowly, in order to decipher the trail.

Nearer they drew.

Now their voices could be heard and their shadowy forms seen.

Straight for the vine clad cliff they came. Presently they were at its base, and within touching distance of the fugitives.

Their talk could be plainly heard, and their copper colored visages were visible in the torch light.

It was a thrilling moment for the three fugitives.

The least sound would have betrayed their presence.

The result would have been tragical.

In guttural tones the savages discussed the mysterious ending of the trail.

But they never dreamed that the precipice was hollow—never imagined that their quarry was so near them.

They discussed the subject for some while and then passed on into the forest searching for a renewal of the trail.

The trapper drew a breath of relief.

Alice ventured to whisper:

"Are we sure of our safety now, think you?"

"That is hard to say," replied the trapper, dubiously.

"But they have gone by?"

"Yes, but they will return!"

The hours passed wearily by.

The trapper would not permit any noise or movement to be made. This seemed a bit inconsistent in view of the fact that the savages had passed by.

But the scout knew well that the danger was by no means over.

And his fears found verification, when suddenly light footsteps were heard and dark forms were seen hovering about in the darkness outside.

Losing the trail, it had been the first impulse of the savages to look for a hiding-place.

But they did not discover that under the cliff by the best of good luck.

They passed it by, and after a time all signs of their presence ceased.

For the first time Panther Joe brightened up.

"Cheer up, ladies," he said, lightly, "we're all safe now, I reckon."

"Do you believe it?" asked Alice.

"Yes, I'm mighty sure of it. But p'raps I'd better take a little scout out to be more sure."

"Oh, you are not going to leave the cave now?"

"Jest fer a minit. Ye needn't have much fear. I'll be back soon."

But Alice clung to the scout's arm.

"Oh, I beg of you do not go!" she cried. "I cannot have you go!"

The scout was surprised.

"Don't be afraid, lady!" he said. "I'll pooty soon come back!"

"Oh, but I cannot let you go! I feel—I cannot tell you how I feel about it. I fear that you will never come back."

The scout could not help but be deeply impressed with this thrilling declaration.

Yet he realized well the necessity of the reconnoitering tour.

He ascribed Alice's fears to an attack of nervous terror, and with some firmness but respect said:

"Lady, you must not try to hinder me. It's fer our interest ye know. Panther Joe ain't the kind to go away an' leave ye of his own accord."

"I am not a bit afraid of that," cried the settler's wife, "but I have a dreadful feeling that you will come to harm."

The trapper laughed.

"Wall, ye needn't worry about me," he declared. "I've fout Injins all my life, an' I kin swar that I'm old enough now ter know their tricks!"

Alice could say no more.

Yet a species of awful deadly terror had seized her.

She could not rid herself of it, and the belief was strong upon her that she would never see the trapper again when he left the cavern.

Panther Joe, with his trusty rifle in his hand, lifted the veil of vines and crept out into the darkness.

He disappeared and the two lone, helpless women were left to themselves.

Alice bowed her face in her hands, and, giving way to her feelings, sobbed aloud in her terror.

"Oh, mother!" she whispered, in agony, "what shall do? He will never come back, and we are left here all alone!"

"Indeed, my child," said Mrs. Walker, steadily and hopefully, "I don't see why you should think that. I see no reason why he will not return safely."

But Alice was positive in her belief that Panther Joe would not come back.

And that belief found dreadful verification. The hours passed and still he did not come.

There was no manner of doubt about it. Something had happened to the brave trapper.

The position of the lone, defenseless women was a dreadful one.

CHAPTER VII.

A FIGHT WITH A GRIZZLY.

THE moment that Leslie Walker, the settler, leaped out of the Steam Wagon, he was stricken down by a bullet.

Frank Reade, Jr., just behind him saw a puff of smoke come from a distant thicket.

The would-be assassins was, doubtless, there concealed.

The young inventor, with lightning rapidity, threw his rifle to his shoulder and fired at the thicket.

There was a distant yell, a savage form was seen to tumble out of the thicket.

It was evident that Frank's shot had told.

Then the young inventor sprang to Walker's side.

"Come, Barney, Pomp, quick, and give help!" he cried.

Walker lay quite motionless upon the hard ground.

There was a wound upon his forehead, which looked as if the bullet had penetrated the brain.

In that moment Frank Reade, Jr., had not the slightest doubt but that the settler was dead.

A feeling of horrified regret had already settled about his heart.

But as he knelt down over the settler, he saw the eyelids quiver, a spasm passed over his features and he opened his eyes.

He looked up into Frank's face in a rational way and smiled.

"I reckon something hit me," he said, lightly. "Was it a bullet?"

"Heavens, man," cried Frank, with horror, "the bullet is in your head! How can you live and speak?"

"Not much," retorted Walker, rising upon his elbow. "I'm all right, I tell ye. I'm better than any number of dead men."

Frank was amazed.

He placed his finger upon the wound.

He firmly expected to find a bullet hole there.

But he was deceived. There was nothing of the kind.

The bullet had struck the skull lightly and glanced off, abrading the skin and causing some blood to flow, but that was the extent of the injury.

Certainly it was a narrow escape.

In a few moments Walker was upon his feet, practically as well as ever.

The Indian who had fired the shot evidently had no colleagues, for no other shot followed.

There seemed to be no other savages in the vicinity, so Walker and Frank proceeded to carry out their original plan.

Barney and Pomp were left in the wagon, and, after giving them certain instructions, Frank took his departure.

The two reconnoiterers climbed the hill slowly, for it was a steep ascent.

As they mounted higher, they obtained a wide and extended view of the region about.

That part which they desired to see to the westward, however, was cut off from their view here.

It was necessary to ascend higher, and this they did.

But when half way up the steep hill, they met with a thrilling adventure.

Suddenly Walker paused and clutched Frank's arm.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed.

The young inventor thought of savages, and pulled back the hammer of his rifle.

"What?" he asked.

"Danger ahead!"

"Where?"

"Don't you see him?" It is Old Ephraim, and he's a big one!"

Frank knew that Old Ephraim was the synonym for grizzly bear in the West, and at once he understood.

He gazed at the mountain side and saw a monster specimen of the grizzly crouched in their path.

He was a perfect leviathan in point of size.

Moreover, his aspect was most ferocious, and the manner in which he opened and snapped his huge jaws was ominous indeed.

It was certain that he also meant to dispute the passage of the hill.

"Heavens!" exclaimed Frank, in amazement. "He's a monster, isn't he?"

"You're just right!" replied the settler, with a laugh.

Walker seemed to regard the affair as a great joke.

He raised his rifle.

"What are you going to do?" asked Frank.

"Give him one!"

"But a single bullet will not be apt to hurt him. They are a bad lot to handle, you know!"

"Oh, we can keep out of his way!" cried the settler, recklessly. "Here goes!"

And with that he pulled the trigger.

A good hunter knows well enough what effect a bullet has upon a grizzly bear.

It is seldom that one bullet is sufficient to kill.

The pain maddens the animal, and unless a man is exceedingly nimble, and is on favorable ground, escape is by no means easy.

The result of Walker's shot was just what Frank feared it would be.

It struck the bear in the shoulder and inflicted a painful but not fatal wound.

With a roar of pain the animal reared itself in the air.

Walker fired again.

But this shot did not stop the bear, which came down the hill like a cannon ball.

Frank leaped to one side.

He shouted to Walker to do the same. But the settler's foot slipped, and he was not given time.

The next moment the bear was upon him.

Crushed back by the tremendous weight Walker went down in a heap.

The bear's jaws were within a short distance of his head.

A circumstance of the most trivial kind spared the settler's life then.

The bear in coming down the hill had acquired such momentum that he was actually carried completely over Walker's form.

The clumsy brute turned a complete somersault and landed in a clump of pines.

He was upon his feet instantly and mad as a March hare.

But the settler was now also up and sought safety behind a huge stump.

As the bear came rushing for him Walker gave him another shot.

Frank now got the range of the big beast and quickly terminated the conflict.

A bullet under the shoulder did this, as it reached the bear's heart. The beast leaped in the air and fell in a heap.

He was dead almost instantly.

"Whew!" exclaimed the settler, as he pulled himself together, "that was a close call for me, eh?"

"You're right!" agreed Frank. "And I am inclined to believe you a reckless man."

"Well, I was in that case!" admitted Walker.

"Are you hurt at all?"

"Only a few scratches!"

"A fortunate escape, indeed."

"But ain't he a monster!"

"As large a grizzly as I ever saw."

They made a brief examination of the bear. Frank would have liked his skin well enough but there was no time for this.

So they pressed on up the hill.

Very soon now they reached the summit of the eminence.

The view spread out before them was wonderful and varied.

Prairie and hills were blended with plateaus and deep valleys. Far to the northward were seen great columns of smoke or vapor.

"That is undoubtedly the geyser region that I am looking for," declared Frank. "I must make a note of this!"

He drew a note book from his pocket and proceeded to make a rude map of the region.

But Walker was looking with anxious gaze for some sign of the Blackfeet, and if possible to locate their village.

It was his belief that his women folk had been taken thither.

To locate it was the first move. With the help of Frank Reade, Jr., and the Steam Horse, he believed that he could effect the rescue all right.

But suddenly a sharp, horrified cry escaped his lips.

A sight had met his gaze which for a moment paralyzed him.

"My God! It is awful!"

"What is it?" asked Frank, eagerly.

"Look!"

Walker pointed to a low valley just below. There, in an open clearing, a terrible tragedy was being enacted.

In the center of the clearing was a heavy stake driven in the ground.

To this was bound a white man.

About the clearing were a score of savages engaged in collecting brush to heap about the stake.

It was evident that they meant to roast their victim alive at the stake.

It was a horrible scene and an awful reflection to the two spectators.

"Horrible!" gasped Frank; "they evidently mean to take his life."

"That is certain."

"The fiends! But we are not men to stand idly here and see that terrible deed enacted."

"So say I! Let us go to the rescue at once!" cried Walker.

The brave settler was about to start down the mountain side.

But Frank restrained him.

"Wait!" he said.

"Why?"

"It will be folly for two of us to attack such weight of numbers."

"But we must save the man."

"We can do that in a better way."

"How?"

"Back to the Horse! It will be easy to gallop around this hill, and we ought to be there in full time to stop the horrible work."

"All right!" agreed Walker; "we must work quickly."

"Right you are!"

Down the mountain side they ran at full speed.

They could now see the Steam Horse below them. Barney and Pomp were faithfully on guard.

Down the hillside ran the two excited men.

They reached the wagon all out of breath, and Frank, leaping in, cried:

"Get your rifles ready, Barney and Pomp. There's work ahead for us!"

"All right, sir!" cried Barney.

"Jes' so, Marse Frank," returned Pomp.

Then Frank opened the throttle.

Around the hill the Steam Horse ran at full speed. On and on until suddenly Walker cried:

"There they are!"

All now with horror saw that the savage had heaped brush about the man bound to the stake, and that smoke was arising from it.

They were dancing about their victim with fiendish yells.

There was not a moment to lose.

Frank opened the whistle valve and sent up a reassuring blast. The savages, astounded, turned to see the dreaded Steam Horse bearing down upon them like a Nemesis. It was too much for their courage.

CHAPTER VIII.

A TIMELY RESCUE.

WHEN Panther Joe left the two women in the precipice cave he had not the slightest idea that he was not to return again that night.

His knowledge of Indian signs was almost illimitable, and he believed that he was right in his premise that none of the red foe were in the vicinity.

In one sense he was right.

The foe had abandoned the trail.

But there were yet several lurking in the vicinity, as he very speedily found out.

He glided like a shadow among the trees. But he had not been long outside the cave when he became aware that the foe were all about him.

What was to be done?

Joe was much discomfited.

In fact, he was bound to admit that he had never been so completely deceived before in his life.

He was also in a quandary.

What was to be done?

To return to the cave would have been to disclose the hiding-place of the women fugitives.

This would never do.

And now came back to Joe the strange forebodings expressed by Alice Walker.

"By heavens!" he muttered, "I reckon she was right arter all! What in tarnation am I goin' ter do? These confounded reds have spotted me. I kain't go back, an' if I don't get out of here, I'll get collared."

Panther Joe played hide and seek with his foes in the underbrush for a time.

Then his mind was made up.

There was but one thing to do.

This was to lead the foes away from the vicinity of the hiding-place of the two women.

He knew well enough that the redskins would dog him, thinking no doubt in that manner to learn where the fugitives were concealed.

"I'll lead 'em a good chase!" muttered Joe, with a chuckle.

His only way now was to lead the Blackfeet away to a good distance, then elude them and return.

As yet he had seen but one of the Blackfeet.

But that prescience, which is ever with a genuine woodsman, informed him that there was a legion of them following him.

However, he boldly shouldered his rifle and started away through the forest.

For two miles he kept on, threading the tangled forest.

Then matters suddenly came to a crisis in an unlooked-for manner.

The trapper knew that his foes were following him closely.

He reached a small stream which trickled down through the woodland.

Just beyond was a dark patch of woodland, gloomy and dark as Erebus.

The trapper here had made up his mind to slip the foe.

But he did not succeed as well as he had hoped he would, as after events will show.

Plunging into the dark woods, the trapper for a moment fancied that he was out of sight of the foe.

Catching the lower limb of a pine tree, he suddenly drew himself up into its recesses.

There he waited patiently for some length of time.

Then he saw silent, shadowy forms gliding from one tree to another below.

He knew that they were the savages trailing him. He chuckled to himself at his success in outwitting them.

He believed that it would be an easy matter to slip out of the tree and return to the cave.

But even the shrewdest of beings will sometimes reckon without a host.

That this was not altogether a difficult matter near events were to prove.

Panther Joe waited until he was well assured that the last savage had passed.

Then he slipped down out of the tree. Quickly he glided back toward the brook.

Chuckling to himself he began to ford the stream.

But he was exactly in the middle when he heard a guttural grunt.

Looking up quick as a flash he saw a number of dark forms before him.

That they were savages there was no manner of doubt.

That he was entrapped was also certain, for as he turned to retreat he found a number of the foe in his rear.

"White man no make fight; he be killed quick!" was the guttural exclamation.

"Trapped!" muttered the trapper, with sinking heart. But he was not the one to give up without a struggle. He knew that capture meant death by the most horrible of torture. So quick as a flash he raised his rifle and fired. Then he made a backward leap out of the brook. The next moment he was in the midst of his foes.

The struggle which followed was a most deadly one. But the savages were too numerous for the plucky trapper and he was overpowered.

His arms were bound behind him with stout thongs. Then, in the midst of the crew of savages, he was led away through the forest.

The light of day was now breaking in the east. For miles they tramped on, and finally camped at the base of a high hill in a little clearing.

Here the score of Blackfeet seemed to hold a council. They consumed some time in smoking the pipe and going through the ceremonies of the council.

Then finally a decision seemed to have been reached. A number of the savages proceeded to plant a heavy post in the ground near. The trapper knew at once what his fate was to be.

The stoutest heart will quail at the thought of a death at the stake. The scout's face paled. But he set his lips rigidly and was determined to die game.

Rapidly the preparations were made. Finally Joe was bound to the stake and heaps of brush piled about him.

Then the savages made a circle about the prisoner and indulged in a war dance of grotesque sort. One of them set fire to the brush finally and then the trapper really gave up all hope.

As the flames started upward and he began to feel their heat he realized truly that his end had come.

"It's all up, I reckon!" he muttered. "I ain't been ther best man thet ever was, but I ain't been ther wust nuther."

A rude prayer was upon his lips, when suddenly a strange sound smote upon the woodland air.

It was the shrill blast of a steam whistle. It was at this critical moment that the Steam Horse appeared upon the scene, as we have seen at the close of a preceding chapter.

The Horse made for the savages full tilt. Barney and Pomp and Walker all opened fire with their rifles.

The result was that a number of the savages were shot down before the others took to flight.

Bringing the Steam Horse to a stop, Frank Reade, Jr.'s first move was to leap out of the wagon and rush in among the burning brush.

He quickly scattered it before the flames could reach the prisoner. Then he cut Panther Joe's bonds.

The trapper was so amazed that he hardly knew what to do. The Horse was no surprise to him, for he had met Frank Reade, Jr., at a settlement below a few weeks previous.

But Walker gave a great cry, and made a joyful rush forward. "Hello, Panther Joe!" he cried, wildly. "Is it really you?"

"In course it is," cried the trapper. "But look here, lad, I've got a bone to pick with you."

"Eh, what do you mean?"

"What did you go off and leave your women in such a plight for?" A wild, incoherent cry escaped the settler's lips.

"My God! it is too much joy. Do tell me that they are safe!" cried the wildly excited settler.

"Wall," said the trapper, coolly, "I was lucky enough to jest be able to pull them out of ther fire, thet's all."

"God bless you, Joe!" said Walker, in a choking voice. "Then they're safe?"

"I reckon they are."

"They had trouble with the savages?"

"Yes, and were captured. But I chased the reds up and sneaked into camp and rescued them."

"Panther Joe, you're a hero!" cried the settler, wildly. "I followed your path as well as I could, but I think I got lost."

"Wall, ye did, my lad," declared the trapper. "Ye went a little out of yer way. But I never would have sent ye this way if I had known the reds were on the rampage."

"Oh, that is all right, Joe. I accept your kindness for the deed!"

"Wall, jest as soon as I learned of the true state of affairs, I started up hyar to look after ye. I've done it to ther best of my ability. Anyway, I've saved yer women fer ye!"

"God bless you for that, Joe. Are they very near here?"

"Not more than three miles."

"Oh, take me to them!"

"In course I will!"

Then the trapper turned and greeted Frank Reade, Jr., pleasantly. Arrangements were quickly made.

As the woods were tolerably clear of underbrush, the Steam Horse could pick its way along finely.

In this way the distance to the cave was quickly covered. Leslie Walker was beside himself with joy.

He demanded and listened to a dozen accounts of the affair from the scout's lips.

He deluged the trapper with a literal flood of questions. "So they really had a hard scrimmage with the Blackfeet?" he asked.

"Yas, they did!" replied Joe.

"And they got away from them?"

"Yas."

"So the old prairie schooner is at the bottom of the canyon! Well, I think I shall have to give up my claim and go back East."

"Don't do it!" cried the trapper, emphatically. "Ye mustn't give up so easy. All will come out right yet!"

They were now near the cave.

The trapper leaped out of the wagon and Leslie Walker was close at his side.

"Do ye see that cliff?" cried the scout. "Wall, under them vines ye'll find a cave. They're in thar!"

As he spoke the trapper reached the precipice wall. He grasped the vines and then was given a startling shock. No sound came from within the cave.

Even before he lifted the veil of vines the scout guessed the startling truth.

He raised the vines and glanced into the cave. His sudden fears found instant verification, for the cave was empty; the inmates were gone.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE RENEGADE'S POWER.

LEFT to themselves in the cavern, the position of the two defenseless women was by no means a cheerful one.

Alice was quite overcome with nervous fear, and inclined to be hysterical.

Mrs. Walker was cool, however, and did all she could to comfort the sufferer.

"Have courage, my dear!" said the elder woman. "Your fears may be all for naught."

"Oh, but I cannot help it, mother!" sobbed the wretched woman. "It is not my fault. But I will try to be brave. It may be that my nerves are weak!"

"It is undoubtedly so, my child!" declared the mother. "You will feel better soon. Let us hope for the safe return of the brave trapper."

"Ah, if I could feel assured of that," she exclaimed, earnestly, "I think I could bear up well."

"God will not desert us!"

But as the reader knows the trapper did not return. Indeed, he was at that moment far from the spot and being pursued by the red foe.

The minutes dragged slowly by into an hour. As yet there was no sign of the return of Panther Joe.

The situation was a terrible one. Even Mrs. Walker's nerves were beginning to give out.

"Indeed!" she exclaimed, "I think it very strange. Can it be that anything has happened to him?"

"You may be sure of it," cried Alice, earnestly. "I know that my premonition was correct. We shall never see Panther Joe again!"

It was a desperate thought and the situation hard to face.

"Heavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Walker, with a shiver. "What will be our fate?"

"God only knows!"

"I would not know what direction to take to reach a settlement. What could we do in these awful wilds?"

Indeed that was a question which at the moment the two women would have found it hard to answer.

Mrs. Walker was of that type of Western woman who knows how to endure hardship and face danger.

All her life she had battled with the dangers of a new country. Therefore, it was not strange that she should meet this terrible situation with more of cool courage and fortitude than the younger woman.

But at this moment an incident occurred to precipitate matters and put the courage of the two females to the test.

Suddenly there was a rustling sound outside the cavern.

In an instant the two women were upon the *qui vive*.

It did not seem that this could indicate anything short of the fact that their hiding-place had been discovered.

It had, but not by the Blackfeet.

A dark form suddenly darkened the entrance to the cavern.

There was a low, deep growl, and a guttural grunt.

Half fainting with horror, Alice gasped:

"It is not an Indian, mother. It is a bear!"

This was the truth.

The most unwelcome visitor stood upon the threshold of the cave and growled fiercely.

What had attracted the brute to the cave was a question.

It might have been that he had scented the inmates and was disposed to feel warlike, or, on the other hand, he possibly made the cave a lair.

However this was, he was on hand, and apparently a tough customer to handle.

"My soul!" exclaimed Mrs. Walker. "We are in a bad fix."

But now that the crisis had really come, Alice Walker was nerved to boldness.

She clutched her rifle firmly and faced the intruder.

Of course there was a possibility that the brute would retreat and go peaceably away.

In that case no harm might come of the affair.

But it was easy to see now that the bear had no such idea. The brute advanced slowly into the cave, growling fiercely.

"Mother, he is going to attack us," said Alice, firmly. "We must give him a death shot if we can."

Both women knew well enough what that would mean.

Beyond all doubt it would bring the savages down upon them. But there seemed no other way. The bear advanced another step. It was the signal for Alice. "God help us!" was her prayer. Raising the rifle quickly, she fired point blank at the beast. She had aimed for the animal's eye. She knew that it was the most vulnerable point in that position.

At that short range the aim was perfect. The bullet penetrated the bear's brain, the huge monster reared and fell directly at the feet of the two women.

It was a courageous and remarkable feat for a woman slender and frail as was Alice Walker.

She was beyond doubt entitled to much credit for her bravery. But now that the peril was over, her nerves again gave way. She sank in a hysterical leap at the older woman's feet.

Mrs. Walker at once devoted all her energies to the consolation of the unnerved woman.

"Oh, I fear we are surely lost!" wailed Alice, brokenly. "We have escaped one peril only to fall into a deeper one. I am very sure those savages have heard the shot and will discover us!"

"Let us hope not," said Mrs. Walker. "It is no use hoping against fate. After all what have we gained? Better to have been eaten up by the bear than to fall into the hands of the Blackfeet."

Mrs. Walker felt inwardly that this was too true. But the fears of both found speedy verification.

Suddenly there was the flash of a torch and then a light shone into the cave.

Guttural exclamations filled the air and the forms of a number of savages could be seen hovering about the entrance to the cave.

It was a thrilling moment. Alice was suffocating with the awful horror of the thing and was unable to act.

Before either woman could make a move to resist, the savages sprang into the cave and seized them.

In less time than it takes to tell it they were once more prisoners. Words cannot describe the awful terror experienced by the captives.

The savages treated them with contumely and sneers, and dragged them forcibly from the cave.

They were compelled to march ignominiously through the forest back to the camp they had left.

Part of the band were yet there and their numbers seemed to have been augmented by new-comers.

The two women were brought triumphantly into camp, bound to a couple of pine trees, and a grand pow-wow and dance was held about them.

Indeed, brush was brought and heaped about them, and they would have been burned to death upon the spot but for a sudden intervention.

Into the camp circle strode a white man. He was tall and heavy framed, with dark, scowling features.

His dress was part savage, and at his appearance the savages fell back with much servility.

"What's this?" he growled, advancing and peering into the faces of the women.

One of the savages made a few guttural statements in explanation. "Women, eh?" exclaimed the renegade, for such he appeared to be.

"Wall, I like that. One on 'em is pooty too. Whar did ye find 'em, Red Knife?"

"Find in woods—in cave," replied the savage. "Jericho! one on 'em is young and pooty. Confound yer foolishness, cut them ropes on ther wrists. Thet's no way to use a woman."

Alice's lovely face lit up at this. For an instant she fancied that here was a champion. He was at least a white man and could not be devoid of mercy.

"Oh, sir!" she cried, pleadingly, "you will listen to our prayers. You will be a friend to us and set us free. You are a white man!"

Something like a sardonic smile flitted across the renegade's face.

"Wall, I like that pooty one," he said, harshly. "Don't ye fear. No harm will come to ye. I'll take care of that. I ain't seen a woman in ten years I've taken sich a fancy to as you."

Alice shrank back. In that moment she regretted her eager speech.

She read the purpose of the wretch and his real character in that moment.

Her heart sank within her. All seemed lost. The renegade saw the shrinking motion and laughed.

"Oh, ye thought I'd set ye free, eh? Oh, no, that ain't Sid Reynolds's way."

At the mention of his name Alice experienced awful terror. That name was known through all the North-west as belonging to an inhuman monster—a blood-thirsty brute.

More homes had been despoiled, more settlements burned by this wretch than any other.

But the bonds of the two captives were cut, and a tepee having been erected near, they were placed in that for the remainder of the night.

The next day, and after a sleepless night, they were visited by two of the braves, who led them out and forced them upon the backs of ponies.

Then a start was made to the northward by the whole band. The renegade, Sid Reynolds, was not in the party.

It was evident that the savages were acting under orders to take the captives to the Blackfoot village.

This, as Alice had gathered from stray bits of conversation she had overheard, was far to the northward, and beyond the region of geysers. Despair was in the hearts of the unfortunate women.

It did seem as if theirs was a hopeless case. They had absolutely no hope of ever seeing their friends again in life.

Alice thought of her husband, who doubtless was in agonized quest for her, and her heart was nigh bursting.

Deep regrets filled her soul. Why had they ventured into this terrible region?

Better have been satisfied to remain within the confines of civilization.

Of course it was possible that rescue would come yet. And thus hoping on, fervently the two women suffered themselves to be carried deeper into captivity, and seemingly to a fate worse than death.

CHAPTER X.

DIVIDING THE PARTY.

THE trapper experienced a thrill of horror when he found that the cave in which he had left the two women was empty.

At once he knew the truth. He was confident that they would not have left the cave on their own account.

They would certainly have awaited his return. There was no doubt but that they were in the power of the savages.

It was an awful thought. Then Panther Joe thought of the agonized husband at his shoulder.

He turned slowly and with a face ghastly in its pallor. "Friends!" he said, briefly, "the worst has happened. They are gone, but we'll rescue them yet!"

"Gone!" wailed the settler, in a delirium of despair, as he rushed into the cave. "Oh, God! they are lost!"

"No, no!" cried the trapper, clutching his arm, "they have certainly been made prisoners and we'll rescue them."

But Walker was inconsolable. He would listen to no word of comfort or hope.

However, if pursuit of the redskins was to be instituted, there was no time to be lost.

Panther Joe made no doubt that they had gone to their camp in the woods.

He knew the way thither, and had no trouble in reaching the spot. But the camp had been abandoned and the redskins were gone.

However, evidence was found clearly enough that the two women had been taken to that spot a second time.

Where the tepee had stood the scout found a fragment of a shawl, which Walker identified as having belonged to his wife.

There seemed no way but to follow the trail. Accordingly, Panther Joe took it.

Progress was now necessarily slow, and they reached a wood so dense that the Steam Horse could not make its way through it.

There was now no alternative but to divide the party. While the Horse made a detour, others must go forward on foot.

It was decided after some consultation that Panther Joe and Walker, with Barney, should take the trail.

Frank Reade, Jr., and Pomp were to make the detour. Accordingly, the three trailers struck out into the woods.

They were quickly out of sight. "Well, Pomp," said Frank, as he took the reins, "it's you and I, is it?"

"I reckon dat am a fac', Marse Frank," replied the darky. Pomp was delighted at the idea of traveling with Frank Reade, Jr.

The young inventor could not confer a greater favor upon the darky than to select him as his companion.

So Pomp, with alacrity, proceeded to assist Frank in driving the Steam Horse.

Leaving the three trailers for a time, let us follow the adventures of Frank and Pomp.

The Steam Horse soon had skirted the edge of the forest and came to a level plateau.

Frank held the Horse down to a lively gait across this, and a broken country of hills and hollows now presented itself.

Beyond this, however, over the hill tops a gray, misty cloud was seen.

It was like a bank of fog, but Frank knew what it was. There was no doubt but that it was vapor from the hot springs and geysers of that region, which he had been long in quest of.

"Then it is really a fact," muttered the young inventor. "I must visit the region and substantiate it."

Indeed, it seemed directly in his path. Panther Joe had averred it his belief that the Blackfeet village was beyond this.

There seemed no way of rejoining the trailers until that region was reached, so Frank decided to go ahead.

He sent the Steam Horse on at a rapid gait. Hills were climbed, belts of timber threaded, small streams forded, and at length the Steam Horse topped an eminence, and the wonderful region of hot springs was spread out to view.

And it was a wonderful region in very truth. One might have indulged in a light stretch of the imagination and fancied themselves at the portals of Hades itself.

As far as the eye could reach to the northward was a mighty region of boiling springs, hot lakes and sulphurous streams.

Mighty geysers with cannon-like thunder would break from the trembling earth and mount upward hundreds of feet.

The Yellowstone region seemed wholly outdone.

No tourist had as yet penetrated to this enchanted valley of the North-west.

It was a region wholly unexplored, and Frank Reade, Jr., gazed upon it with silent wonder.

"Golly, Marse Frank!" muttered Pomp. "It am a drefful place 'steam an' smoke, amn't it?"

"A good abode for the legions of Satan!" laughed Frank.

"You'se jes' right dar, sah!"

Frank watched the scene a while, and then with sudden inspiration said:

"Look here, Pomp!"

"Well, sah?"

"You will not be afraid to remain here alone for a few moments?" The darky chuckled and shrugged his shoulders.

"Huh! does yer flink I is a bo'n coward, Marse Frank?"

"No, I know better," replied Frank. "Of course you will do it. But I would like to go down there on foot and take a little look at that place."

"A'right, sah. Yo' kin go right along fo' all ob me."

"There is no sign of any enemy hereabouts, and I think we shall be perfectly safe."

"Suah, Marse Frank."

With this the young inventor took his rifle and left the Steam Horse.

He descended into the hot valley, walking upon a crust of some white material resembling lime.

It was like walking through a city of geysers.

There was not a little risk in walking upon the valley's crust, but Frank accepted it readily enough.

At times the crust undulated and seemed about to cave in.

But Frank knew that it would stand a severe strain.

Beneath the crust he knew there was a vast lake of hot water.

To have been precipitated into this would have been death.

So Frank took due caution.

Wonderful sights were spread upon every hand.

The mighty geysers threw great columns of water high in the air, to fall with tremendous thunder to the earth.

At times Frank would come to extinct geysers.

Here would be found a beautiful sight.

Oftentimes a wide basin would be revealed, polished by the action of the water and silica until it resembled the finest and daintiest of porcelain.

At times treacherous looking air holes in the valley's crust would be seen.

Through these the boiling waters could be seen beneath.

Once Frank came to a deep well-like basin, with the water of such wonderful clearness and purity that he could see the sandy bottom plainly.

Objects there magnified to an enormous extent.

And as he continued to gaze Frank beheld an object which gave an awful shock.

It was imbedded in the white sands and lay revealed as the skeleton of a man.

Some poor mortal in crossing the treacherous valley had slipped into a hot basin and ended his career.

Frank turned away with a shiver.

He had penetrated into the valley far enough to be sure that it was many miles to the wooded country beyond.

"Maybe the Blackfeet crossed this valley," he muttered, dubiously.

"But I stand much in doubt of it."

He saw an opportunity to skirt the valley to the westward with the Steam Horse.

There was firm and smooth ground, and he determined to try it.

Accordingly he turned back in the direction of the Horse.

As he did so he saw Pomp perched on top of the wagon.

The darky was waving his arms and beckoning to him excitedly.

The young inventor was astonished.

"What can be the matter?" he muttered. "I can see no Indians about."

However, he started back for the Horse with all speed.

Rushing up the eminence, he was hailed by Pomp.

"Oh, Marse Frank, yo' mus' come jes' as quick as eber yo' kin!"

"What's the matter with you?" asked the young inventor, sharply.

"Fo' goodness sakes, Marse Frank, de Injins hab jes' gwine ober dat ar rise an' dey done hab dem two women wif 'em on de back of ponies!"

Frank was electrified with this declaration.

"You don't mean it, Pomp!" he cried.

"I jes' does, sah. Yes, it am de Injins fo' suah!"

"You say they have gone out of sight beyond that rise of land?"

"Fo' suthin' suah, sah!"

"All right!"

Frank opened the throttle and let the Steam Horse out.

They fairly flew over the intervening distance to the hill named by Pomp.

Up this they went.

Then a thrilling sight was revealed.

A mighty lake lay spread before their vision. The savages had just entered canoes and were leaving the shore.

Frank saw the two female captives in one of the canoes.

The Indians saw the Steam Horse at that moment and set up a wild yell of defiance.

"Just too late!" muttered Frank, in dismay. "What shall we do?"

But his mind was quickly made up.

He knew that the Indians were pulling across the lake to their village. It would no doubt take a long detour, but he would skirt it and cut off their landing.

With his mind made up to this, Frank let the Steam Horse go along the sandy shore.

But they had not proceeded one hundred yards when it was seen that an immense log lay across the path.

The lake was upon one side and impenetrable woods upon the other. Progress was certainly barred until the log was removed.

Frank was in a dilemma.

But not for long.

He suddenly grabbed an ax and sprang out of the wagon.

"We'll soon spoil that obstruction," he cried. "Here goes!"

He rushed to the log with ax upraised. It descended, but before it could be raised again up from behind the log sprang a dozen painted savages.

They had been secreted there all the while, and were upon Frank like wolves.

Before the young inventor hardly realized his danger he was a prisoner.

Pomp on board the steam wagon saw the situation with horror.

He opened fire upon the crew of redskins, and tumbled two of them over.

But in his great excitement he had not thought of the rear part of his wagon.

Suddenly he heard a yell behind him.

Into the wagon sprang three brawny savages. Before he could make a move they were upon him.

He was almost instantly overpowered. Both himself and Frank were hopeless prisoners.

It was a sudden turning of tables. The savages crossing the lake now turned back and came ashore. Great excitement reigned supreme.

CHAPTER XI.

SAVAGE TORTURE.

AMONG the attacking savages Frank had seen a white man.

It was the renegade, Sid Reynolds.

The villain was beside himself with glee. He fairly roared with triumph.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he shouted, "that war ther best little game I ever seed played. Worked well, didn't it?"

He advanced to Frank and poked him in the ribs with his hand.

"Hi! my highfalutin inventor," he cried. "Kinder takin' a little grief, ain't ye? I reckon that Steam Hoss of your'n will make a nice little rig fer me."

Frank only glanced contemptuously at the fellow.

"You are a fine specimen!" he cried, coolly. "Couldn't find any better business than mixing up with redskins, eh?"

"What's that ter you?" growled the renegade. "I'm a good enough man ter hev ther best of you!"

"It seems so just now."

"Ye needn't be so sassy!"

"There is no law to compel you to address your remarks to me!"

The villain was furious.

"That's all right!" he roared. "We'll see how much you can afford to play the part."

He turned and gave several guttural orders to the savages.

The two canoes with the women prisoners in them now came ashore.

The renegade held a brief conference with the savages.

They seemed to approve of his remarks, for they were supplemented with triumphant yells.

"Well, Pomp, we're in a bad scrapel!" said Frank, to his faithful servitor.

"Golly, you'se jus' right, Marse Frank."

"I'm afraid we shall not pull out of it very easy!"

But the darky shook his head.

"Don' yo' gib up hope, Marse Frank. Dere am all ob de oders hot on de trail. Dey may come up at any moment an' jes' rescue us a'right."

"I hope you are right!" said Frank, hopefully, "but I must say that it looks most dubious."

The renegade had climbed into the Steam Wagon and was endeavoring to learn its mechanism.

He seemed to succeed, for the Steam Horse started forward at a gallop.

The obstructing log had been removed, and Reynolds guided the Horse for some distance down the shore.

Here there was a break in the forest, or wide clearing.

Into this the renegade directed the Steam Horse, and brought it to a stop.

Pretty quick along came the other with the prisoners.

They entered the clearing also, and proceeded to make camp.

At first Frank was somewhat mystified at this action.

But presently enlightenment came.

The renegade advanced, and with a caustic smile said:

"Ah, Mister Frank Reade, Jr., ye kin prepare fer yer funeral right away. We've a nice little mess ready fer ye!"

"I am not afraid to die!" replied Frank, coolly.

"Oh, ye ain't, eh?"

"No!"

"Wall, how would ye like to die ther death we have planned fer ye? We're goin' ter take yer hide off, and then pour hot water on yer toughen ye up agin!"

The villain laughed in a demoniac fashion.

Frank experienced a sick feeling at the pit of his stomach. He realized that the villain would keep his word.

It was useless to appeal to him for mercy of any kind.

That the Blackfeet would not shrink from inflicting so hideous a torture was certain.

There were not a few cases on record of unfortunate victims who had been flayed alive in this atrocious fashion.

From his position Frank could see the preparations going on.

Pomp had been elected to run a deadly gantlet of knives.

Alice Walker had been removed to one corner of the clearing. But Mrs. Walker had come under the death penalty and was bound to a stake.

That they meant to burn her alive was certain.

"My God!" gasped Frank; "you don't mean to burn that poor woman!"

"Wall, kain't ye see?" replied the renegade, harshly. "Hain't ye got eyes?"

"That is an inhuman thing."

"P'raps so."

"You are a monster. Retribution will overtake you yet!"

"Easy thar!" gritted the renegade, darkly.

"Look here, Sid Reynolds," said Frank, forcibly, "you're a white man just the same as I am. There must be somewhere in your heart a spark of humanity."

The renegade winced.

"Wall, thar ain't!" he replied, gruffly.

"I can understand how these ignorant savages can commit such atrocities," said Frank, coolly, "but a white, who has had the advantages of the average, is hard indeed who can do such a thing."

A hard light shone in Reynolds' eye.

"Shall I tell ye why I kin see it done?" he gritted, savagely. "Thar was a time when I was a Christian man. But my confidence was abused. I was jilted by the girl I loved; falsely traduced and robbed by my own brother. Do you think I have any faith in human nature? No, it is all deceptive and lying, and all are alike. It's every man for himself. Thar's nothin' too hard for me to do now. Why, I had ther revenge of choking my treacherous brother to death!"

"My soul!" gasped Frank. "Ycu don't mean that!"

"Yas, I do!"

"Then enough! I believe you are capable of anything!"

The renegade laughed harshly.

"Ye'll find out that I am!" he replied.

But the preparations for the death torture were made.

Stakes had been driven in the ground and stout thongs attached to them. To these Frank Reade, Jr., was to be bound.

The young inventor was now overcome with awful horror.

He saw that an awful fate was close upon him. There seemed no escape.

He thought of Panther Joe and the others. If they should happen along at the right moment the tables might be turned.

At length two savages advanced and began to divest Frank of his clothes.

The upper part of his body was bared. Then he was bound to the ground by means of the four stakes.

Two savages with keen hunting knives advanced. One of them went so far as to draw the back of his knife across Frank's ribs.

Then the carnival of torture suffered a sudden interruption.

There was a report of fire-arms, one of the flaying savages tumbled forward dead, and the other, terrified, dropped his weapons.

Frank Reade, Jr., felt a wild leap of the heart. Rescue was at hand.

Walker, Barney and Panther Joe had arrived just in the nick of time.

They had taken in the situation at a glance and made quick action. Instantly the renegade Reynolds shouted to his band of savages, and they dashed for cover, leaving the prisoners where they were.

Then a bush fight followed.

It would have seemed that with all their odds the savages should have prevailed.

That they did not do so, however, was a certain and remarkable fact.

Slowly but steadily the three plucky white rescuers drove them back into the depths of the forest.

In the meanwhile, Frank Reade, Jr., had managed to pull up one of the stakes which bound him to the ground.

This gave him at once the use of one of his hands.

Within his reach lay one of the sharp knives with which it had been intended to torture him.

Frank seized this and quickly cut his bonds.

But he was in an exposed position, and to arise to his feet would have been to invite a shot from the foe.

Therefore, he adopted a clever mode of extricating himself from his dangerous position.

This was to roll over and over upon the ground until he reached the edge of the bank which overlooked the lake.

Over this he rolled, and now out of range he quickly joined his friends.

The delight of all three to welcome him could not be easily expressed in words.

Frank was provided with revolvers, which were nearly as effective as a rifle at that range.

A hot fire was now poured into the woods, and the savages were quickly driven back.

Pomp was reached and his bonds cut, as also was Mrs. Walker.

But Alice was not to be found.

She had mysteriously disappeared.

There was little doubt, however, but that the renegade Sid Reynolds had carried her away in the retreat.

The rage, grief and despair of Walker was pitiable to witness.

"I tell you she is lost if she is in the power of that fiend!" he cried, wildly. "It is all up, and I am a heart-broken man!"

"Have good grit, pard!" declared Panther Joe. "We'll overtake ther coyote."

But Walker was inconsolable.

The Steam Horse was just where the renegade had left it.

The wonderful invention was intact, and as Frank Reade, Jr., sprang aboard he opened the valve and gave a triumphant whistle.

Plans were quickly made to pursue the abductors of Alice Walker.

As all could not get aboard the Steam Wagon, it was decided that Barney, Walker and Panther Joe should go on ahead, as before.

The others, Frank, Pomp and Mrs. Walker, would ride.

Frank found a good smooth path along the shore of the lake, and sent the Horse ahead at a fairly rapid gait.

Thrilling incidents were near at hand.

CHAPTER XII.

SURROUNDED BY FOES.

FRANK READE, JR., had no doubt but that the prisoner, Alice Walker, would be taken to the Blackfoot village direct.

Therefore he started at full speed as soon as open ground was reached.

There was fighting going on in the woods, as he knew by the crack of rifles coming therefrom.

But the young inventor believed this was only a dodge upon the part of Sid Reynolds to cover the retreat of the main body with their captive.

"I tell you, Pomp, that by going direct to Red Knife's village we shall gain more than one point. We shall cut off the party going thither with their prisoner and make a flank movement which ought to defeat the savages."

"I reckon you're right, Marse Frank," agreed the darky, "but dis chile don' wanten fo'git dat dar am apt to be a big crowd at dat village."

"What of that?" cried Frank. "We ought to be able to clear them out."

The darky was a bit doubtful, but he said no more.

The Steam Horse had now rounded the upper end of the lake and was rapidly leaving it behind.

A picturesque region was now encountered, and suddenly they came to a long and narrow depression which seemed to merge into a sort of canyon far below.

"Golly!" cried Pomp, "dat am a cur'us looking place. Does yo' s'pose dat de Injen village am down dar?"

"I don't know," replied Frank. "We can go down and see."

With this the young inventor let the Horse gallop down into the place.

I was a curious sensation which all experienced as they passed through the gate-like entrance to the lower valley.

It was like entering the portals of some division of Hades.

The ravine soon merged into a narrow passageway, with mighty trees growing out of the steep ascent upon either hand.

This vast growth of forest increased as they proceeded further into the place.

Suddenly they came into what seemed to be a veritable pocket between high hills. Upon all sides the ascent was precipitous and covered with a dense growth of trees.

Then, as they continued deeper into the pocket, a lower canyon was seen.

Passing through this, they came out on a wide plain.

It was certainly a curious transition.

This plain, thick with matted grass, extended as far as the eye could reach.

So dense and matted was the grass that the Steam Horse could wade through it but slowly.

Frank Reade, Jr., had got some distance out upon this plain ere he recognized the fact that he had made a grievous mistake in attempting its passage.

At intervals in the plain there were tall buttes.

Toward one of these Frank now made his way.

"Well, upon my word!" he declared, "I have never encountered anything like this in all my life."

"Golly, Marse Frank, I don' jes' see how we will ebber git froo dis yer place."

"You're right, Pomp!" cried Frank, with apprehension. "I am afraid I made a mistake in attempting it."

Indeed, the situation was peculiar.

The Horse could barely wade through the grass. It twined about the axles, got into the Horse's joints and literally trigged the machinery most effectually.

At length the Horse came to a dead stop.

It could not go further.

There was but just one thing to do.

This was to go out and begin the laborious work of clearing the grass from the various parts of the machinery.

They were at the moment not more fifty yards from one of the steep buttes which like sentinels dotted the plain.

"I see no other way but for us to clear that grass away and then turn back," said Frank, disappointedly.

"Fo' suah, Marse Frank," agreed the darky.

He had advanced to the door of the wagon to get out when a startling thing happened.

A loud and thrilling war-whoop arose upon the air.

From behind the butte, wallowing in the matted grass, there appeared a large band of Blackfeet.

They were mounted and their ponies could not much more than walk in the dense grass.

"Massy sakes, Marse Frank!" cried the terrified darky. "Now we'se in fo' it, fo' suah."

They were certainly in for it.

A scream of terror burst from Mrs. Walker's lips. Frank turned pale and Pomp would have done the same if he could have.

Anchored they were, and they could not retreat or advance.

There was nothing left but to fight, and the battle must be a desperate one.

At such close quarters two men against a hundred seemed ridiculous odds.

But Frank Reade, Jr., picked up his repeating rifle.

He touched a spring and closed the wagon curtains.

"We've got to fight for our lives, Pomp!" he cried, grimly. "I fear that we are done for."

But the brave darky was already at one of the port-holes.

The savages had opened fire.

Arrows and bullets came rattling against the Steam Horse.

"Give it to them!" said Frank.

His rifle spoke and one of the savages fell from his pony.

Down into the deep grass now went the whole band.

In a thrice they had surrounded the Steam Horse.

The battle now opened hot and desperate. Bullets flew like hail.

It required some time for the savages to discover that their shots could not penetrate to the inmates of the wagon.

This discomfited them not a little and put a new face upon matters at once.

It became evident to them at once that the only way to capture the Steam Horse was by a daring *coup de main*.

This was what Frank dreaded.

He knew well the result.

There was not the slightest doubt but that they would succeed in destroying the Steam Horse and massacring the inmates of the wagon.

It was the most desperate position that Frank Reade, Jr., had ever been in in his whole career.

There seemed absolutely no salvation for the beleaguered ones. Death in awful shape confronted them.

But Frank Reade, Jr., was not the one to easily give up.

He would fight boldly and pluckily to the end. Then he would die, as the Western phrase has it, "with boots on!"

Pomp, though not of a particularly courageous turn of mind, was devoted to his master.

The darky realized the situation well. He knew that their salvation alone depended upon beating off the red foe.

So he fired into the long grass just as fast as he could work his repeating rifle.

It seemed now as if the climax had come.

The savages could be seen everywhere advancing through the long grass to the attack.

There was no doubt but that they would triumph. Time was brief now for the two brave defenders.

But fate had ordered it more strangely.

At that moment, when all hope had fled and the beleaguered ones were resigned to their fate, a startling turn of affairs took place.

Pomp was the first to perceive it. With a loud cry he pointed to the distant horizon.

"Look! Fo' de Lor'. Marse Frank, jes' yo' look at dat. De perairy am on fire suttin as yo' live!"

Frank turned and gazed in the direction indicated through a port-hole.

The declaration was true enough.

The prairie was all afire.

Great clouds of smoke were leaping zenithward, great lines of fire were encompassing the horizon.

"My God! What will be the end of this?" groaned Frank.

The discovery had made a startling impression upon the savages.

At once they had started full bent for their ponies.

They seemed to recognize the fact that their salvation depended upon getting off the prairie at once.

Their ponies could proceed but slowly and there was no time to lose.

Everybody knows with what rapidity a prairie fire runs.

Indeed the fleetest of horses have difficulty in outracing it.

Frank Reade, Jr., gazed at the distant fire with a thrill of horror.

To be sure it had terminated the possibility of dying beneath the tomahawks of the savages.

But on the other hand a fate hardly less terrible threatened.

It was hard to say which was the worst.

They had literally become transferred from the frying pan into the fire.

Frank realized at once what a hopeless, in fact, utterly useless task it would be to attempt to clear the machinery and get off the plain.

They could not even get the Steam Horse into working order before the fire must be upon them.

Desperate indeed was the situation.

What was to be done?

There seemed no way to avoid the dreadful fate.

On came the terrible flames.

The prairie was in a ripe state for a terrible fire.

The grass was so long and matted and dry as tinder that the fire would run with frightful force.

"My God! we are lost!" groaned Frank Reade, Jr.

Indeed, this seemed a fact.

But in the very desperation of the moment Frank looked about for a way out of the scrape.

And in that moment he saw the tall butte not fifty yards distant.

In an instant he saw escape from death. But a chill struck him as he reflected that the Steam Horse was doomed.

There was no way to save it.

And now it struck the young inventor as extremely odd that the savages had not thought of the butte.

But they had not, and were now far out on the prairie.

They were struggling desperately to get through the long grass.

With inspiration Frank threw open the door of the cage, and cried:

"Come, Pomp, we can save ourselves!"

"Golly!" cried the darky, in amazement. "How am dat, Marse Frank?"

"Ask no questions, but come on!"

Mrs. Walker was as much surprised as Pomp.

But she allowed Frank to help her out of the wagon.

In that moment Pomp also thought of the butte.

"Fo' de Lor', it am funny dat we neber fought ob dat afo', Marse Frank!" he cried.

But Frank was assisting Mrs. Walker to the butte through the long grass.

It required but a short while for the adventurers to climb up over its ledges to a safe height.

Four or five of the Indian ponies were grazing far up the side of the butte, having climbed there after their savage owners were shot.

And now, safe upon their elevated perch, our adventurers beheld a most wonderful and thrilling sight, and which they never forgot to the end of their days.

On came the fire with mighty rush and roar.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE END.

It nearly wrung Frank's heart to realize that there was positively no way to save the Steam Horse.

The famous invention was certainly doomed to destruction.

With race horse speed the flames came on. It was a grand and most awful spectacle to witness.

In the van of the fire there ran in a terrified mob a conglomerated mass of wild animals.

Strange to say, none of these attempted to climb the butte.

The butte split their line and they went on at headlong speed.

They were being rapidly overtaken by the flames, however.

Now the great mountainous mass of flame came surging down upon the butte.

For a moment it seemed as if they must overwhelm the eminence.

Even at their height the heat of the flames for our adventurers was almost unbearable.

The next moment the flames enveloped the Steam Horse.

For a moment the Horse was enveloped from view.

Then there was a tremendous explosion as the boiler blew up.

The flames swept on in their destructive course.

All that was left of the wonderful Steam Horse was a heap of useless iron.

Pomp as well as Frank was visibly affected. Neither made comment though.

But presently Pomp cried:

"Fo' Hebben's sake! Jes' yo' look out dar, Marse Frank?"

The young inventor beheld a thrilling sight.

The savages had not been able to get off the prairie.

Had they reached the hills they would have been safe, but the flames overtook them.

For a moment they were visible, then the flames swallowed them up.

It was a thrilling sight.

Nigh a hundred of the bloodthirsty brutes, however, had expiated their crimes.

The fire quickly swept over the rest of the prairie.

It now presented a blackened appearance. Frank and Pomp descended and took a look at the remains of the Steam Horse.

But the young inventor was not the one to long give way to grief at any misfortune.

"Come, Pomp!" he said, brusquely, "the best thing we can do now is to go back and join the rest of the party."

This was true enough.

But Mrs. Walker could never have accomplished the distance on foot.

A happy thought struck Pomp.

He saw the Indian ponies grazing on the side of the butte.

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